

Implications—The Limits of Semiotic Inquiry in Musicology

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Resumen: El presente artículo examina el modo en el que la teoría y la metodología se articulan y desarrollan en la disciplina musicológica. Especial importancia cobra para este propósito el estudio de las interpretaciones en conflicto que la figura del lingüista y semiólogo Ferdinand de Saussure ha despertado, en particular las del semiólogo Marshall Blonsky, quien no encuentra en su obra sino cuestiones ya agotadas, y las del lingüista Benjamin Fortson, quien por el contrario las considera desde la brillantez de su pensamiento científico. El acercamiento musicológico a la teoría lingüística, heredero de una posición crítica de implicaciones semiológicas, ha resultado en lo que Blonsky describe como la trascendencia propia de los significados estables, algo que a su vez ha diseminado y escindido ideológicamente la disciplina musicológica. En este artículo se sostiene que la teoría de la lingüística es una vía más favorable que la semiótica en su acercamiento a la ciencia musicológica y, partiendo de esta posición, demuestra que la alianza interdisciplinaria entre lingüística y musicología permitiría que ambas disciplinas se integraran en una alianza capaz de atender a sus intereses compartidos.

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Palabras clave: *Curso de lingüística general* de Ferdinand de Saussure, lingüística, literatura, antropología cultural, didáctica de la lengua, didáctica de la literatura.

Abstract: *This paper examines the mechanics of theory and methodology in the production of musicology. Of particular importance to this writing are the conflicting interpretations of linguist and semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure's work: in their references to it, semiotician Marshall Blonsky sees terminal stasis, linguist Benjamin Fortson, bold scientific thinking. Having inherited a critical approach aligned with semiotics, musicology's approach to analysis has resulted in the construction of what Blonsky describes as transcendently stable meaning, which, by extension, has fragmented and factionalized musicology. It is this paper's arguments that linguistic theory is more favorable to musicology than semiotic theory and that the alignment of linguistics and musicology will allow these disciplines to integrate research and perspectives on shared interests.*

Keywords: *Musicology, Semiotics, Linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, Critical Analysis.*

Notes confirm that I began this work February 18, 2014. It was, and remains, a first principle of this work that musicological glosses-conventions such as transcription and staff notation, and, more generally, the assignation of what semiotician Marshall Blonsky describes as transcendently stable meaning—will, paraphrasing author Richard Wright's comment about the analysis of American blues music, render music progressively smaller. Outside these conventions the music that is this work's subject has been rendered progressively larger. The work is its mission creep: it is about the production of musicology and the mechanics of theory and methodology in the analysis of music.

Binary Constructions and Material Implications

Joseph Kerman writes in *Contemplating Music* about the prominent themes in the work of Charles Seeger: “the one which is usually remarked [Seeger] called ‘the linguocentric predicament’ or ‘the musicological juncture’. This is the incommensurability of

verbal and musical communication, the insuperable problem...that results when words are used to convey anything other than scientific fact. Speech-knowledge of music, he stressed again and again, is very different from music-knowledge of it" (1985: 158). Kerman describes Seeger's "concern for value and valuation" as "another obsessive theme, less frequently remarked upon" and depicts Seeger's work as having "pitted valuation and criticism against science and description as the two basic modes of human inquiry. He slighted neither, at least in theory, and tried to draw on general value theory to develop equally detailed schemes for musical valuation and musical description" (1985: 158). In his distillation of Seeger's work, Kerman serializes three disparate concepts—the incommensurability of verbal and musical communication, speech- and music-knowledge of music, and the philosophy-science binary—though it is Kerman's emphasis on (perhaps Kerman's *recourse to*) the philosophy-science binary that is especially compelling. That binary rests on a structure incapable of bearing the weight Kerman assigns to it, mistaking a curtain wall, which supports the weight of its own materials, for a bearing wall, whose design and materials allow it to accept weight from curtain walls and from above and to transfer this conducted weight and the weight of what it supports to its building's foundation. Contrasting *valuation and criticism* with *science and description* is deception via false equivalency: the merits of these sets relative to their logical underpinnings render them incomparable; further to this, the conceptual demarcation in Kerman's implied binary is the practical demarcation of *falsifiability*, otherwise that which distinguishes science from pseudoscience. And though *valuation and criticism* do not, evidently, aspire to the determinative rigor of scientific inquiry, the evidentiary claims extending from these modes are, in concurrence and relative to science, unsystematic in their provenance and intermittently imperiled by their inferences. The preceding statement is a serviceable example of such an evidentiary claim.

The burden of *valuation and criticism* is immense: to traverse the logical incompatibility that established and assures their function

inside analytic discourse, inquiry via these modes must interpret meaning contained by words as sufficiently insubstantial to warrant repeated dispute and revision but also sufficiently substantial that these disputes and revisions can be presented using words whose meanings are sufficient enough to ensure accessibility and then understanding. *Sufficiency* in each of these respects is determined individually, that is by those valuing and criticizing, and though those responding to another's *valuation and criticism* may challenge these determinations against their own, the more incisive counterclaim would be that concerning the argument's logical consistency. This recalls the contrast between curtain and bearing walls: an argument's logical consistency indicates the capacity of that argument to locate its expression in coherence, though through its use of descriptive language, that argument is appended to the bearing wall of semantics and, ultimately, to the foundation of attested meaning. That is critical: the argument's logical consistency depends on the indispensability of something whose dispensability is among the argument's initial assumptions. The absence of *science and description* from this discussion, to now, is also critical: whether or not this writing's demonstration of *valuation and criticism* concerning Kerman's individual modes, and with them, Kerman's implied/applied binary, is convincing, *science and description* will perpetuate, as they have, via extant connections originating in the foundation formed by the scientific method and extending into the work of its associated disciplines. Kerman's binary may, then, be portrayed as *valuation and criticism's* top-down or stepwise design versus the bottom-up design of *science and description*. While this is not to suggest that *science and description* are without controversy and contention, nor are *science and description* unaffected by language's hazards, this is to suggest that Kerman's binary is a false dichotomy out of which compromise, in an argument to moderation, for example, is unlikely given the distinction inside the binary between *falsifiability* and the impossibility (and, we should add, undesirability) of *falsifiability*. The logical fallacy endemic to the latter is also the catalyst for a mode of inquiry that, to engineer and philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy, ensures the constancy of the liberal order (i.e.,

the society founded in critical reason; cf., Karl Popper’s “Open Society”) against its own interests. These reversions—which Dupuy depicts in the atavism of violence and primitive rites and in a matrix of supplements and exchanges between philosophy and language, all inside and relative to the liberal order—will continue to besiege the liberal order until, as Dupuy argues, the order reconstructs itself. An exegesis of Dupuy’s argument follows in this writing.

All warfare is based on deception

Critical inquiry has burdened music’s contents with the meaning it hesitates assigning to language’s. Richard Taruskin writes about the emergence of Mily Balakirev’s second Overture from Mikhail Glinka’s *Kamárinskaia* in “How the Acorn Took Root: A Tale of Russia”: “the ‘kinetic-syntactic’ processes of Balakirev’s second Overture are so highly developed as inevitably to lend a ‘connotative’ dimension to the national material. The piece seems no longer to be a *fantaisie pittoresque* guided solely by ‘innate musical feeling.’ It *means* something; it is in some sense—but what sense?—a statement about Russia” (1983: 205). Taruskin is referencing Leonard B. Meyer’s “Universalism and Relativism in the Study of Ethnic Music” (1960) throughout, however Taruskin’s use of “Cf.” in the note accompanying the citation between the sentences quoted above indicates that Taruskin’s configuration of meaning should be weighed against Meyer’s. This accounts for Taruskin’s frequent use of quotation marks but also places his italicizing of “means” in sharper relief. Less charitably, this appears to be a tell.

In the matrix of tactics and strategies used in various poker card games is a ploy through which players affect behaviors to conceal their hands’ strength or weakness. Accompanying the observation of these tells is, properly, distrust: the understanding is that demonstrating strength indicates weakness as demonstrating weakness indicates strength. This ploy’s longevity suggests its utility, though that does not absolve it of its totalizing and self-cancelling logic; the presumption that there is no authenticity in player

behavior factionalizes interpretation such that a single tell is at once meaningless and replete with meaning. Taruskin italicizes “means”, professing cautious use of a troublesome word, but does not italicize the far more problematic “is” in the cleft sentence “it is in some sense”, indicating that *this is a statement about Russia*. The remaining determination—*some* sense—is not negligible though for Taruskin it will be, essentially and necessarily, *Russian*. Irrespective of its construction and complexion, and whether it finds consensus among its readers, this is argumentative discourse. Taruskin’s *kabuki* over meaning, weighed against these considerations, would appear to be pointless if it were not an enduring fixture in that category of discourse.

Tangled Hierarchies

To Dupuy (1995: 4), M. C. Escher’s lithograph “Drawing Hands” depicts a static “tangled hierarchy” whose paradox will be resolved “through a wild oscillation between...the operator and the operand, the program and the data, the cause and the effect, the metalanguage and the language...a continuous reversal of levels...each alternately gaining the upper hand for a short time without ever completely defeating each other”. It is the inclusion of time, Dupuy suggests, that will provide for this spectacle’s resolution, however that resolution is no more than an impasse. “Drawing Hands,” via this assessment, offers a useful if inexact analogy for the deference to tells in poker games. In these games, the corrective is, again, time, of and from which player observation, recollection, and comparison are functions. Despite the presumed utility, these processes and responses are situated inside an understanding that may be informed by probability but certainly interprets a greater advantage in superstition, specifically omens. The analogy’s imperfection, then, becomes instructive: probability as it applies to poker play, having been determined by calculations concerning card combinations as well as hand proportion and frequency, is the player’s most consistent counsel but whose guarantees are not seen by players as being commensurate with

profitable gameplay. That absence is consequential and finds a parallel in the responses of goalkeepers to penalty kicks in football. Goalkeepers would do well to remain stationary when facing these kicks—despite some related analysis that suggests the shooter's behavior and foot preference foretell the shot's trajectory—though often goalkeepers choose to dive right or left. In this instance, the goalkeeper's response may result from the goalkeeper having to be seen doing something; both instances demonstrate that poker and football are less mathematical exercises than they are complex social games.

Dupuy's conclusion to "The Self-Deconstruction of the Liberal Order" acknowledges this in divergent ellipses: "an authentic deconstruction would entail deconstructing deconstruction by reversing the order between order and disorder—by placing the disorder or the crisis first. This would mean leaving behind...tangled hierarchies, which preserve an order and an orientation, and returning to the pure, undifferentiated violence evoked by Escher's 'Drawing Hands'" (1995: 15). Scientific inquiry is the *authentic* deconstruction that the liberal order should excavate from itself in conformance with the exigencies of progress and, by extension, self-preservation. Dupuy concludes: "in this way there would finally stand revealed the full polemical charge concealed behind the abstract forms sometimes adopted by productions of the mind" (1995: 15). Dupuy's argument, referencing Popper (q.v., *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*, 1972), is that the transition to critical reason made possible by the emergence of descriptive and argumentative language was an internalizing into the world of ideas the violence from the natural world. The eliminative function of violence in the latter, now having been assimilated into the former, would entail the constant refinement, through deconstruction, of theories and beliefs (i.e., productions of the mind). The use of the subjunctive here is imperative: to Dupuy (1995: 7) the "pure, undifferentiated violence" of deconstruction is "no greater than that of the destructive acts mimed in a ritual or on the stage of a theater" (1995: 8), having been defanged by

philosophy so as to protect philosophy's order of reason (and *the* order of reason), embedded in the hierarchies (e.g., cultural, religious, sacred, symbolic) of modern societies—i.e., the liberal order—against what is perceived as an existential threat to them in the disorder of *authentic* deconstruction. In that there is, as Dupuy recognizes, “no difference...between traditional societies subject to a religious order and the liberal order of modern societies” (1995: 15).

Discussing the entanglements, hierarchies, and feigned reversals that differentiate deconstruction from *authentic* deconstruction, Dupuy acknowledges “how sophisticatedly abstract human passions can become when they inhabit the world of ideas” (1995: 9). Philosophy's reliance on such abstractions effectively plays both sides—abstract writing is, at best, supplementary and literal writing, ineffective—against its own interests in establishing what Dupuy describes, though not without derision, as philosophy's privileged communing with truth and meaning. While philosophy may entertain abstraction and disorder it will inevitably favor and impose order. Dupuy's use of *authentic* throughout to describe deconstruction creates a distinction that Dupuy collapses, as he must, at his conclusion. *Deconstruction* is authentic *deconstruction* and what has passed for deconstruction is rather a performance, which Dupuy describes as the “‘carnival’ of philosophy.” Returning to Taruskin, it is his attention to assigning meaning that aligns with the methods underpinning an unreconstructed deconstruction. Consider the following, taken from Taruskin's analysis of Glinka's “Dance Song”: “a modulation has thus been achieved with marvelous economy to the unexpected (but, as we have seen, hardly unprepared) key of B flat. The reprise of the Dance Song having been made in the twice-adumbrated key of the flat submediant, the final triumphant return to D major is effected by the same bass resolution...derived from the incipit of the Wedding Song” (Taruskin, 1983: 192). To Taruskin, the “retransition back to the Dance Song after the reprise of the Wedding Song” is the most significant instance “of the tightly coordinated interplay of melodic

and harmonic events” (1983: 192). Taruskin’s substantiation of this depends on a critical approach assured in its ability to locate not only significance but intent in music, as indicated by the narrative Taruskin asserts (e.g., “marvelous economy to the unexpected...key of B flat”; “the final triumphant return to D major”). In contrast, there is the volatility of “Drawing Hands”—incremental co-creation, existential impasse, and, absent time, the inability to find resolution in the existential impasse it suggests (though the action could also end in one hand’s dominance), variously the constructive tension of eliminative violence, the polemical charge whose internalizing birthed the liberal order.

Mirror Stages

Discussing the first congress of the International Association of Semiotic Studies, held in Milan in 1974 and at which semiotics had come to be “grasped as a discourse, an instrument of action as well as the bearer of messages” (Blonsky, 1985: XX), Marshall Blonsky, writes in “The Agony of Semiotics: Reassessing the Discipline”: “the science of signs envisioned by [Ferdinand de] Saussure does not yet exist. What exists is a *story* about such a science, told in universities and from time to time in the councils of letters. The discipline of signs is still a narrative of a discipline of signs.” (1985: XX). The tangled hierarchies constituent in unreconstructed deconstruction, those Dupuy reduces to order’s ascendancy over disorder, are resident in Blonsky’s account of unreconstructed semiotics: “we need to, and can do things other than watch signs make and *un*make their meanings. If we pass beyond the sign to its production, to codes, then we can spy out primary codes rather than supporting ones. We can do other than content ourselves with seeming to have reached a profound meaning, a transcendently stable content, or signified” (Blonsky, 1985: XVIII). The final word in the previous indicates that Dupuy and Blonsky are addressing the same dilemma: reweighting the balance in semiotics is to correct the imbalance caused by a disproportionate emphasis on the signified; the profound meaning and transcendently stable content of the

signified correlate with what Dupuy identifies as the imposition of order. In this imbalance, and paraphrasing Dupuy, “one recognizes the vicious logic that [Jacques] Derrida calls the ‘logic of the supplement’” (1995: 3). Dupuy’s analysis of that vicious logic serves as the antecedent to his analysis of “Drawing Hands”. Immediately prior to that analysis, Dupuy writes: “[Derrida] reverses the hierarchy between philosophy and writing by showing that the former is irremediably subject to rhetoric; but he simultaneously maintains the primacy of philosophy over writing by asserting that *the order of reason is absolute and cannot be transcended* [emphasis added]” (1995: 3). Citing philosophers Vincent Descombes (q.v., Descombes, 1977) and Christopher Norris (q.v., Norris, 1987), and his own study (1995: 3) of the “figures embodied by the logic of the supplement” (q.v., Dupuy, 1990), Dupuy observes in the logic of the supplement—and in Derrida’s description of that logic as “the ‘reversal of a hierarchical opposition’” (1995: 3)—the double game described by Descombes, literature’s revenge on philosophy as described by Norris, and a logic consumed, as Dupuy writes, by “violence, envy, fascination, and resentment” (1995: 3). Deconstruction, “thanks to the vague notion of ‘undecidability’”, can assert its capacity to accommodate this tangled or double hierarchy yet this “would seem to be one hierarchy too many” (Dupuy, 1995: 3). That twinned assertion of hierarchical superiority in a binary system is, to Dupuy, Escher’s “Drawing Hands”. Overburdening the signified, then, is an animating of the logic of the supplement: animating the action in “Drawing Hands” is to intervene in the tangled hierarchy of signifier and signified in semiotics; both promise resolution, though resolution requires enforcing the ascendancy of the signified. Depending on extent, this reinforcement could concede to the intrinsic frailty of the signified though the far more practical concern is strengthening the signified such that it can contain the chaos perceived in the signifier (cf., Dupuy’s observation that as “liberal thinkers posit the self-sufficiency of civil society, they cannot help referring, even if only through denial, to that which undermines the order from within”

(1995: 6) and Blonsky's that semiotics, the discipline of signs, is founded on a narrative inside which it remains).

Ouroboros

Saussure's science of signs, to Blonsky, is varying the narrative of a discipline of signs, the story about such a science, and non-existent. It is possible for these idea sets to intersect though the concessions required for this would be, again, determined in accordance with a subjective notion of coherence. Here again, the original violence of critical reason: transcendently stable meaning delivered through a reduction in dynamism made possible by and through semiotic inquiry. In this winnowing Dupuy recognizes a larger catastrophe: "because [deconstructionists] are at war with the concept of Logos, and are not likely to submit to the rigor of formalization...[and] because their bias in favor of writing...too often leads them to cut themselves off from the forward movement of the sciences...we seem doomed to continue in this absurd situation, where the same form is seen by some as representing autonomous reality, and is used by others to deconstruct any pretension to autonomy and totalization" (1995: 6). The emergent methodology is a reassigning of the dichotomy paradox: if perception and discourse are corrupt and coherence totalizing, then inquiry is unanchored and inevitably catatonic. Blonsky portrays this mystification as an unremarkable aspect of observation: "reading the chain of signs, the so-called text, we can follow the successivity of meanings" (1985: XVIII). To Dupuy, perception unmediated equates to internecine derangement: "an authentic deconstruction would entail deconstructing deconstruction by reversing the order between order and disorder—by placing the disorder or crisis first. This would mean...returning to...pure, undifferentiated violence...In this way there would finally stand revealed the full polemical charge concealed behind the abstract forms sometimes adopted by productions of the mind" (1995: 15). The inference is that the rigor of formalization, the forward movement of the sciences, and the ascendancy of disorder over

order are coordinate elements in an overarching approach to deconstruction—here Dupuy’s *authentic* deconstruction—that transcends deconstruction. In practice, and presuming large-scale continuity between Dupuy and Blonsky, this transcendent approach would be informed, as Blonsky offers, by reading “not only what the language is saying, its content, signified, cause, or philosophy [but also] what the language is doing, its material deployment, the social intervention being accomplished by its signifying elements, its signifiers” (1985: XVIII). This is a convincing argument about the signifier that would be self-devouring were its restraint not provided for, or supplemented, by the signified. The tangled hierarchy’s resolution is, again, at an impasse.

Saussure ~ Saussure

In their study of relative chronologies and, specifically, morphological seriation, in Proto-Indo-European (PIE), J.P. Mallory and D.Q. Adams contend that the attempt by linguists to determine the different layers of Indo-European is a “scheme [that] always worked better in theory than in practice” (2006: 88). The evidence they use to support this dispute is that features, specifically *o*-stems, presumed to have developed more recently “seemed to belong to pretty basic layers of the Indo-European vocabulary” (2006: 88). Mallory and Adams conclude that the evidence presented “can decide the antiquity of the formation but not of the actual object” (2006: 89), thereby restricting the alleged scheme’s initial expanse and utility, the evidence considered by them is relevant to this writing. From their analysis:

These basic items of the lexicon required explaining away and of course explanations were offered. For instance, the names of fierce animals were *o*-stems because they were not the real names of animals but rather late circumlocutions, e.g. the word for bear could be derived from a root meaning ‘destroy’, and wolf is the adjective ‘dangerous’ changed into a noun with a shift in accent.... In all these cases, so it is argued, we are

reconstructing words of no great antiquity that may have been created either to avoid tabu, i.e. names of fierce animals are often governed by tabu (you don't say the name of you-know-what or you might find yourself its next meal), or they are derived from poetic language. The conundrum here is fairly obvious—if these words, tabu replacements or poetic epithets, were created to replace another word, they presuppose the existence of the earlier word, i.e. Indo-Europeans surely knew of bears and wolves and had a name for the animals before they replace it with another; alternatively, at an equally earlier date, the Proto-Indo-Europeans burst into a rapture of poetic metaphor in first encountering a wolf or bear (Mallory and Adams, 2006: 88-89).

In parentheses, at the close of his introduction to comparative reconstruction in *Indo-European Language and Culture* Benjamin Fortson writes:

in setting up correspondence sets we must exclude instances where a symbolic relationship obtains between the sounds in a word and its meaning, as in onomatopoeic words. But such cases are very rare, because in the vast majority of words the relationship between sound and meaning is purely arbitrary. This important fact, technically referred to as the *arbitrariness of the linguistic sign*, undergirds the whole science of comparative linguistics (Fortson, 2010: 105).

It is this arbitrariness, as Fortson mentions, concluding his introduction, which “lends regular sound correspondences their significance for reconstructing history” (2010: 105). The attested correspondences between sound and meaning in the examples of *bear* and *wolf* are grounded in a symbolism whose essential purposefulness exceeds the arbitrariness that likely attended the words' formation. Interpretation of these correspondences indicates that the *arbitrariness of linguistic signs* has not prevented linguists from considering the “proliferation of terms for a single referent” (Mallory and Adams, 2006: 112) in much the same way

that scientists are not dissuaded in their work by unanswered questions concerning the universe's formation. Extending from arbitrariness in the former and the absence of a teleological argument in the latter are maximalist arguments such as Derrida's own refusal "to characterize his approach in relation to any positive descriptor: 'he tells us that deconstruction is neither an analytical nor a critical tool; neither a method, nor an operation, nor an act performed on a text by a subject; that it is, rather, a term that resists both definition and translation'" (Honderich, 1995: 180 qtd. in Downing, 2000: 79) and the position taken by political commentator Bill O'Reilly in this exchange with evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins:

O'Reilly: I'm throwing in with Jesus rather than throwing in with you guys because you guys can't tell me how it all got here. You guys don't know.

Dawkins: We're working on it. Physicists are—

O'Reilly: When you get it then maybe I'll listen. (Secular Talk, 2014)

Dawkins and O'Reilly are immersed in a cross-cultural discussion at cross-purposes: science does not aspire to produce totalizing truth claims and it is the absence of these truth claims that will cause science to continue to be indicted for not producing totalizing truth claims; perhaps the clearest indicator of unworkability is O'Reilly's use of *maybe*. To this and to the subject of this writing, Fortson's study of ablaut and laryngeal theory is particularly incisive: "ablaut was the key to deducing the existence of laryngeals, an insight that we owe to the nineteenth-century Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. His reasoning bears relating; it is a brilliant example of straightforward but also very bold scientific thinking" (Fortson, 2010: 472-473). Fortson's description of Saussure's work in analyzing Sanskrit verb classes and the verbs *cleanse* and *join* is a fine instance in print of what Thomas Sebeok describes as verbally expressed syntactic iconicity (1985: 456): Saussure noticed, reasoned, then deduced; his innovation was to

apply the “technique of internal reconstruction *to reconstructed PIE itself*, at the time a very radical thing to do—especially if it resulted in the positing of a set of consonants that had not survived as consonants into recorded history (as far as was then known). His starting point was the supposition that superficially different formations belonging to the same morphological categories had once been formed identically” (Fortson, 2010: 478-479). Saussure’s theory is not without disagreement, certainly, but its permanence in linguistics has been underwritten by subsequent inquiry, which has encompassed further critical examination of Saussure’s reasoning. It is understandable, for reasons this writing will consider in greater detail toward its conclusion, why Blonsky would suggest that the science of signs Saussure envisioned does not exist despite the radiant example of such a science in Saussure’s laryngeal theory. Dupuy’s insistence that critical inquiry is violence would not meet with much resistance provided each interpretation of what constituted *violence* were not held in contention. The question, then, is one of degree: as Dupuy mentions, “the name deconstruction has chosen for itself expresses well enough the charge of violence within it, even if ‘deconstruction’ appears insipid compared to its source, the heideggerian *Destruktion*” (Dupuy, 1995: 2). That which metastasized into zero-sum violence in deconstruction became for linguistics *authentic* deconstruction, a method of refinement relative to its suppositions and the preempting of transcendently stable meaning. Saussure’s inferences concerning the existence of laryngeals are of immense importance to this writing given that this writing is predicated on Saussure having transcended the tangled hierarchy in establishing it. In their respective references to Saussure’s work, Blonsky sees virtually terminal stasis, Fortson, very bold scientific thinking; assured in this reasoning is Dupuy’s suggestion concerning *authentic* deconstruction’s methodological parity with scientific inquiry.

Praxis

Printed on a signboard above a newly rebranded public trash can in Amsterdam's De Pijp neighborhood is this quotation from author Hans Christian Andersen: "*Waar woorden tekort schieten spreekt de muziek*" ("Where words fail music speaks"). Outside overwrought figurative or literal use, this is exactly wrong. Musicology's burden though has been to defend this as somehow accurate. The discipline should not be so accommodating.

Greg Ginn of American band Black Flag, remarked "you have to be able to play everyday to get to the point where you can speak with music as you do with words" (qtd. in Carducci, 1994: 316), recalling Kerman's commentary on Seeger's distinction between speech-knowledge of music and music-knowledge of music and furthering the metaphorical correspondence between music and language expressed also in the technical term *prosody* (derived from the Greek word *prosōidia*, *pros* toward + *oide* from *aoide* song [cf. ode]), alternately used to describe poetic meter and versification as well as patterns of stress and intonation in utterances. Metaphorical correspondence here finds agreement with Seeger's concept concerning the *linguocentric predicament* (above these concepts are depicted as unrelated). Curt Kirkwood of American band the Meat Puppets told an interviewer "you can have an ideal of perfection in your head, and practice can go way beyond that idea" (qtd. in Carducci, 1994: 28), which both addresses the psychophysical aspect of musical performance and the effect of that performance on bands' creative processes. Seeger is right in recognizing that a detailed account of psychophysical engagement may strain a musician's facility with descriptive language and he is also right to describe such strain as a predicament. It is, however, an unfortunate misstep for Seeger to interpret this as having confirmed the "incommensurability of verbal and musical communication" (Kerman, 1985: 158) and language's inability (Seeger uses the word *insuperable*) to "convey anything other than scientific fact" (Kerman, 1985: 158). The overarching deficiency in Seeger's reasoning is his conviction, shared by Andersen, that music and language are largely

indistinguishable structures of communication made distinct by music's capacity to become transcendent language (i.e., music is invested with language's semantic coherence though music is more efficient and more expressive in its use) while remaining music.

A rejoinder to this is that the established correlation between the adjectives *triumphant* (q.v., Taruskin's use above) and *major* and *somber* and *minor* finds approximation in the correlation between *bear* and *destroy* and *wolf* and *dangerous* that Mallory and Adams describe. Establishing these associations is, as discussed, the work of argumentative discourse, though this writing recognizes that the methodology associated with Mallory and Adams is more productive than the methodology associated with Taruskin. Among the critical differences is that the inferences of Mallory and Adams are the result of a rigorous, formalized approach conditioned by skepticism whereas Taruskin's are presented as conclusive despite being driven by narrow cultural considerations that are increasingly incoherent (q.v., Schellenberg and von Scheve, 2012).

Robert Walser and Susan McClary end "Start Making Sense!: Musicology Wrestles with Rock" thus: "If musicologists are to start making sense, they must put aside, at least from time to time, the theories that serve so well as protective measures against the heat of the music, that keep the body firmly in check. If an article on popular music can't...then maybe it needs to be rethought" (1988: 292). Walser and McClary have avoided this sugar trap that they urged musicology into and though their self-exclusion suggests an argument made in bad faith their argument is consistent with the dominant corporate culture in musicology. In what is perhaps an attempt to deal critically with the "heat of the music" musicologists (see Kramer, 2001, LeGuin, 2004, *et al.*) have situated their analyses inside the implied narratives of their subjects, thereby subsuming the music's "heat" or essence into the presumptions of their analyses' workaround: that music is narration and that music's meaning resides in what it is narrating. If this recalls the earlier discussion concerning the logic and vicious logic of the supplement, it should. It is that logic and its emergent discursive structure that license Taruskin's analysis of the kinetic-syntactic processes of

Balakirev's second Overture (cf., "[they are] so highly developed as inevitably to lend a 'connotative' dimension to the national material"). Taruskin's conclusions align with Seeger's and Andersen's: "The piece seems no longer to be a *fantaisie pittoresque* guided solely by 'innate musical feeling.' It *means* something; it is in some sense—but what sense?—a statement about Russia." Put differently, the music is moved by music-knowledge of music (i.e., innate musical feeling) and by speech-knowledge of music (it is a statement), another binary distinction that deteriorates into another false dichotomy (cf., Taruskin's argument that the second Overture is principally a statement, one made with music *and* indemnified by semantic coherence) and further into a vestige of Taruskin's central logic: to Taruskin, the music, literally, said something.

Those cultural considerations undoing Taruskin's analysis are destined to be abstract afterthoughts. Whatever their virulence, they were bested by the virulence of the primordial logical fallacy that informs unreconstructed critical discourse. Indicating a proper connection between language and music where only a metaphorical connection exists is certainly appropriate, though it is, by now, indefensible to argue that such a connection is the connection maintained by Taruskin, Andersen, Seeger, *et al.* Understanding the intransigence of that reasoning though necessitates understanding the compulsions that advance its application. It is an article of faith in academia that a generation's work should build on that of the generation preceding. Outside scientific inquiry, this idea of inheritance has led neither to bottom-up design (as suggested by *inheritance*) nor to top-down design (the expected corollary) but has instead scattered curtain walls—here returning to the example used earlier—throughout critical analysis. That example is instructive in its limitations: these walls are suspended independently, *unconnected* to bearing walls but capable of bearing their own weight. As models of critical analysis they provide an earthbound example: their insularity and dissimilarity are dually edifying and devastating, they are self-reliant and logically consistent but only insofar as those interpreting them (remember: the author is

variously dead, lying, and afflicted by dissociative identity disorder; interpretation is similarly, if not as severely, troubled) find themselves in agreement, to whatever extent, with their content (i.e., the consensus between author and reader concerning the meanings assigned to words) and methodology (i.e., that transcendentally stable meaning exists but is ill-defined). Building on this work would entail some negotiation between parodying it and entanglement in an Oedipal struggle against it, and in bypassing the evidentiary burden of *falsifiability* the resulting work would confine itself to the anecdotal. Therein, distrust of formalization and an overvaluing of abstraction and equivocation. The deference to trends against a commitment to incremental progress through interconnected research and analysis will continue to stratify this discourse's critical output. These are, as indicated, the wages of a discursive approach that has strayed into effectively eliminating consequence.

Premises, Practices, and Prospects

During discussion at the Conference on Premises, Practices, and Prospects of Cultural Musicology, convened by the University of Amsterdam's Department of Musicology and held January 24th and 25th 2014, what Dupuy describes as the "eliminative function of rational criticism" (Dupuy, 1995: 1) did not ruthlessly eliminate anything. In response to the incisive criticism leveled against the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) for its 50-year use of a stylized depiction of a sculpture made by the Coclé people of pre-Columbian Panama as its logo, some panelists murmured and another defended SEM's use of the logo as retention branding (i.e., a reason why Coca-Cola's logo, originating in 1887, has remained largely unchanged since 1941). In the context of a conference devoted to musicology it was compelling to hear an appeal to and for intellectual honesty confronted by a defense of plutocratic business practices and disappointing that the discussion was stalled almost immediately. With decorum recovered (this was early the second day), the conference returned to familiar themes in abstract

universals (e.g., meditations on meaning, culture, authenticity *et al.*) and musicology's permissive and public reflection on how best to refer to itself and its work, otherwise self-examination through the attachment of prefixes and suffixes to the apparently unworkable *musicology* (Greek *mousikè* [the art] of the Muse + Greek *lógos*, word, saying, speech, discourse, thought, proportion, ratio, reckoning; *N.B.*: the Society for Ethnomusicology's use of the acronym SEM, not SFE, concedes the volatility intrinsic to *ethnomusicology*). The disclaimer that introduces draft papers for the Premises, Practices, and Prospects conference reminds, "These papers are all in draft form and *not to be cited or otherwise used...*" asserting the indefensibility of the papers' stated arguments and deferring criticism of them. In discussion at the conference a panelist offered, unchallenged, that designating something *music* is overreach. Another that cultural musicology is high-risk musicology or nothing at all. It may not yet matter that it is neither though the introduction of risk is certainly clarifying. Risk assessments function relative to outcomes; absent consequences, they are projections and preferences, and relative to the "high-risk"/"nothing at all" binary, which can be refined further to "productive"/"useless", there is occasion for universal self-congratulation inside the discipline: all cultural musicology's work, because it is *not* nothing, is therefore high-risk and productive. The immense disconnect is that the argument that provoked the strongest response, possibly retaliation, is an argument against obsolescence (i.e., the SEM's logo), however in the context of high-risk cultural musicology, those arguing for *and* against are the daredevils. Maybe so, however the hazards they are after are likely to be deferred indefinitely if they are not altogether nominal. Dupuy is right to interpret this as spectacle: "in this context, deconstruction appears as the 'carnival' of philosophy...the scope of the destruction carried out by deconstruction is no greater than that of the destructive acts mimed in a ritual or on the stage of a theater" (Dupuy, 1995: 15). It is Dupuy's argument that the liberal order's investment in such rituals renders it identical, in principle, to traditional societies. Replacing one spectacle with the spectacle of blood sport would, of course, not solve anything. Both are

demonstrations of the same torpidity. If the eliminative function of rational criticism is to replace the eliminative function of violence, it will be at the behest of those who conceive of rational criticism as an appeal to, quoting ethicist Louis M. Guenin, avoid “deception when given an incentive for deception” (2005: 179). Regardless of Blonsky’s defense of heterodoxy in critical inquiry his depiction of Saussure’s work is intellectually dishonest, evinced earlier in the discussion concerning laryngeal theory. To Blonsky, critical inquiry issues and should continue to issue from an ever-fragmenting diaspora (“Semiotics: A Crisis of Theory”, “Semiotics at the Crossroads”, “Ivory Tower Semiotics”, “Out of the Tower...”, “...Uninvited into the World”, “To What End? ...”, “And What Beginnings?” are the titles of subsections in Blonsky’s “The Agony of Semiotics”) set afoot, perhaps, by the conviction that self-reliance in isolation equates to self-preservation. The Open Society in its embodiment of the “forward movement of the sciences” has not become the dystopia one may have imagined, relative to what Blonsky considers a sanctuary from it: from Dupuy, “a human being, especially the citizen of a society that permits critical and rational debate, has the ability to criticize his or her own theories, to maintain a distance from them, hi [*sic*; Dupuy likely means “in”] the highly autonomous world of productions of the mind...theories shown to be erroneous disappear without their elimination implying that of their author or promoter” (Dupuy, 1995: 1). Theories and ideas being held to account is not the indiscriminate eradication of theories and ideas.

Exclusions

Insanity is sometimes defined as repeating the same behavior and expecting different results. The burden extending from that aphorism is dealing with whatever happens when conveniences are abandoned. I have stated that arguments asserting language’s deficiency should be weighed against the expected license those arguments offer to those making them. Chief among these are the intellectual cover to disappear into a world of one’s design and to

devote subsequent time and attention to furnishing and reinforcing that enclosure. To me, *rock and roll* is invested with an explicit aesthetic and musical history. Others understand *rock and roll* as a collection of words better suited to describing poodle skirts and bobby socks and the general sociology of those wearing those socks and skirts. A succession of arguments made in defense of *rock and roll*'s existence and metaphysics would concede several points, specifically that these arguments are less about music than they are about demanding consensus over word use, an exercise that has partitioned postwar music made in the small band format, along with *rock and roll*, into *blues*, *rhythm and blues*, and *jazz et al.* Each has its own echo chamber. Fortson (2010: 175) writes: "it is not the business of comparative linguistics to reconstruct a panoply of individual variation or even to worry about it", though it is among my and this writing's imperatives, and against science's recourse to idealization, to account for individual variation in music without atomizing the music. The substructure or base isolation for an evidentiary argument about *rock and roll*'s development will remain ancillary to this writing until the attested connections it presents are situated inside an analysis of music independent of genre considerations. That work has been bettered by this work. Both continue.

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